

CHAPTER 5

BECOMING A WORSHIPER

Jesus told us the Father is seeking worshipers (John 4:23). Why? Because He loves both the heart and sacrifices of worshipers. Their lifestyles arise as a fragrant aroma before Him. This is why believers are on a quiet, inner quest to be true worshipers. We want to touch and move the heart of God.

What does it mean to become a worshiper? Someone in the Bible whose example has inspired me personally is that of the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50 who anointed Jesus' feet. Look at the story again, and let's consider how this woman demonstrated the heart of a true worshiper.

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say

to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

WORSHIPERS ARE GIVERS

Using this woman as an example of a worshiper, let’s look at some qualities of worshipers. The first lesson I see in her extravagance is that worshipers are givers.

This woman poured valuable perfume on Jesus. We don’t know how valuable this oil might have been. The “very costly oil of spikenard” that Mary poured upon Jesus in Bethany was valued at roughly a year’s wages (Mark 14:3-5). That was a different incident. Was the fragrant oil of this sinful woman of equal value? It’s unclear. If it was, it could have represented her life savings. What *does* seem clear is that this fragrant oil was more valuable than simply a flask of olive oil. By pouring this oil on Jesus, she was making a significant sacrifice.

This flask of oil was probably not like our jars of perfume today. Our perfume bottles have spray pumps that dispense only a little liquid at a time; or we can unscrew the bottle lid and dab a little perfume here and there. But this woman’s jar or flask was likely made of ceramic or pottery. It didn’t have a screw cap, so the most likely way to get to the contents was to break the jar. Once broken, all the jar’s contents would probably need to be used at once. In bringing this perfume to Jesus, she realized there was no way to give only part; it was all or nothing. This made her offering extravagant, even wasteful. But she gave without hesitation over the cost. In fact, the cost made it all the sweeter for her. Love carried her heart in this beautiful expression of lavish affection.

To some observers, lavish expressions of worship can appear wasteful. But in one sense, there’s something wasteful about all our lives. All of us have a choice—will we waste our lives on ourselves or Jesus?

The Scriptures encourage us to bring a gift when coming to worship the Lord. Psalm 96:8-9 exhorts, “Bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty

of holiness!" In the Old Testament sacrificial system, worshipers were obligated to bring an animal sacrifice (such as a lamb, goat, ram, or turtledove). They were not to appear before God without a gift. "None shall appear before Me empty-handed" (Exod 23:15). Worshipers will prepare an offering when they come to a worship service because worship is always wanting to give. I once heard Jack Hayford say he never would allow an offering plate to go past him without putting something into it. Inspired by his example, I've always tried to be ready to give *something* when I'm in a meeting where an offering is received. The amount is not always the significant thing but the desire to participate in the corporate exercise of bringing an offering.

When we become abandoned worshipers, tithing ceases to be a difficult practice. It's our joy. And offerings beyond the tithe become a delightful privilege. Because worshipers are givers.

Giving financially to the kingdom of God is an integral part of our worship. The way some church liturgies have developed, the offering time sometimes feels disconnected from the worship service. In some churches, we worship, then we listen to the week's announcements, then we have the offering, and then the sermon. To separate giving from the worship service is, in my opinion, unfortunate. The dignity and honor of giving to the Lord from the strength of our labors should be intentionally designed as an integral part of worship. I suggest, therefore, that church leaders look for ways to make the giving of tithes and offerings a vital part of our worship services.

One way to help our giving be more heartfelt is to do it differently from time to time. Do ushers usually pass a plate? Then invite the believers to carry their offering to the front some Sunday. Do people usually give at offering boxes placed at the back of the sanctuary? Then do something different sometime, and receive the offering in a different way. For example, in the course of the singing, families could be invited to come forward together, even kneel together, and

place their offerings on the altar. Different approaches can bump us out of our routines and renew our authenticity in giving.

Let me throw out another creative way to make giving a stronger act of worship. Encourage the church family, perhaps on a specific Sunday, to bring their offering to church in the form of cash. Greenbacks. Currency. Because something happens inside when we give actual cash. Maybe it's just psychological, but when we give real money, it can feel like the gift is more real. When we fill out a check or give electronically, it doesn't feel so hard. For some reason, it feels easier to charge \$100 on a credit card than to dole out five \$20 bills. (Credit card companies are very aware of this and always push credit card sales over cash.) Giving cash seems to engage the heart more. Understanding this dynamic, you could plan a service in which worshipers are invited to offer their cash in a specific way in worship.

Whether or not that's a good idea, my point is this: Let's look for ways to make giving in our corporate gatherings a heartfelt expression of worship to the Lord.

WORSHIPERS ARE PASSIONATE

When this woman came into Jesus' presence, she was weeping. Whatever was going on in her heart, she was feeling it deeply. The tears and poured oil reflected her wholehearted repentance, affection, and gratefulness. Movie actors or actresses may know how to weep on the set when the cameras are recording, but this woman's tears weren't contrived. They revealed a sincere, unveiled heart.

When I wrote the first edition of this book in 1986, I wrote the following: "I will confess that as a man I find it very difficult to cry. Few are the times when I come to tears before God. And that concerns me, because I ask, 'Lord, is my heart too hard before you? I want to be soft and tender in Your presence!' The times of worship that have been most meaningful to me are the times when I cried before God. Brokenness and tears are truly key elements in worship."

Now, over thirty years later, I'm a profoundly different person. The Lord has used the crushing circumstances of life to break the strength of my youth, and in the process has made me a weeper. I realize He answered the cry I articulated in this book over thirty years ago. More than ever, I appreciate the beauty and significance of tears in worship. Never relent until you weep while meditating in the word of God. Be satisfied only with a soft, tender heart that is moved deeply with longing for the fullness of Christ.

We see also that this woman kissed Jesus' feet. This is an authentic way to express worship, for the Greek word for worship—*proskuneo*—means *to kiss the hand toward; to do reverence or homage by kissing the hand; to bow one's self in adoration*. The derivation of *proskuneo* is thought to come from the Greek word for dog. Thus, the original meaning was *to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand*. When I first discovered this, I was somewhat repulsed by the idea. I asked, "Lord, am I like a dog before You? Is that all I mean to You?" But then the Lord began to highlight some beautiful lessons through the etymology of this word.

Although I have always been a dog lover, I owned a dog for only a few years while growing up. Among my fondest memories of *Buster* are the times when we would come home and be greeted by him at the door. From outside, we could hear his tail thumping against the wall and his paws scratching at the door. And when we stepped inside, he was all over us! Jumping, licking, wagging, thumping, twirling—you would have thought he hadn't seen us for weeks! As I remembered those royal welcomes, the Lord whispered to my heart, "How excited are you about being with Me again, when you enter My house?" I realized, then, that this aspect of a dog's nature should mark true worshipers.

Anyone who has ever had a dog knows what it's like to be sitting, perhaps reading, and look over to see the dog just lying there staring. "What are you looking at, mutt?" He seems to talk back with his eyes, "Silly, you know what I want." Finally, tired of being scrutinized, the dog's master asks, "Do you want

to go outside?" Thump, thump, thump. That is what he was waiting for!

Similarly for us, there is an element of waiting in worship—simply staring at the Lord. Worship isn't incessant chatter. Sometimes it's quietly resting in His presence, waiting to hear His voice. When you have a close relationship with someone, communication can sometimes happen without words. Sometimes a look can say things that words can't. Take the time to behold the Lord. Then, when He stirs, we're aware of it.

Then there's the time when the dog comes over to sit by the chair. But he isn't satisfied with sitting next to his master; he has to plop his body right on top of his master's feet. Dogs desire the closeness of physical contact. We desire the same kind of nearness with our Lord. We want to draw close to His heart in worship and lean upon His breast.

WORSHIPERS ARE UNASHAMED

This woman was so taken with Jesus that she wouldn't allow the perceptions of others to deter her. She gave herself in worship to the Lord, realizing that others might even misunderstand her courage and devotion.

Since Luke described this woman as *sinful*, some have supposed she was a prostitute. When she washed Jesus' feet, she let down her hair—a common act for a prostitute in that day. The disciples were no doubt wondering what was going to happen next. Was she coming on to Jesus? When she first entered the room, everyone pretended not to notice. But when she let down her hair, all eyes must have nervously glanced her way.

Worshippers can't go unnoticed. Their extravagance attracts attention. This is one reason some are overly restrained in worship—afraid of what others might think of them if they really show their feelings for Jesus. Peer pressure can have a positive—but also negative—effect on worship. It's kept many from the blessing of opening their hearts to the Lord. Some folks might say, "Oh, that's just Joanie doing

her thing again." Others might shake their heads and think, "Straaaange." But reproach is sometimes part of the cost of being a true worshiper.

Obviously this woman was not following the conventional forms of worship. There's no mention in Psalms of pouring perfume on our Lord's feet. Weeping and kissing and hair—David didn't really give us any instruction concerning these things. Just because an expression of worship appears unique or excessive doesn't mean it's invalid or out of order. When the feelings of the heart are expressed, love is not bound by protocol or rules.

She had tried to fill her longing for love in men, but not she had found the Lover of her soul. So why not give her love to Him unabashedly? Worship gravitates toward the extravagant.

Another insight into worship can be seen in Simon's derogatory thought: "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). Worshipers are sometimes controversial. Some might be affirming, but others are critical.

David was reproached by Michal, for example, when he danced before the ark of the Lord with all his might. Michal was King Saul's daughter, and she despised the thought that a king would behave in such an undignified manner in the presence of the nation. So she scoffed, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (2 Sam 6:20). Michal paid a price for her cynicism, however. As a result, she was never healed of her barrenness. Her story carries a warning: If we become critical of genuine acts of worship, we could hazard spiritual barrenness.

Something inside shrivels when we despise another worshiper.

But worship is controversial. Everyone seems to have their own musical and stylistic preferences. Churches have

split over worship styles and preferences. Congregations have fallen to spiritual barrenness because they resisted authentic expressions of true worship.

The sinful woman in our passage didn't seem to be pleasing any of the people around her, but her sacrifice was pleasing to Jesus. Sometimes we must choose between pleasing man or God. She was willing to endure the censure of others for the sake of giving Jesus her affection.

At first, Jesus seemed to ignore this woman. Her presence was so obvious that everyone was a little nervous, waiting to see what Jesus would do in response. I wonder what the disciples were thinking. *Why is Jesus acting like He doesn't see her? Why doesn't He do something? This woman is obviously out of order. Why doesn't He rebuke her? Why is He letting this thing drag on?* Eventually, Luke tells us that Jesus turned to the woman. The disciples probably sighed in relief. *Finally! Finally Jesus is going to bring correction to this situation.* But instead of rebuking her, Jesus affirmed her. Everyone was probably stunned. But when you stop to think about it, it's comforting to realize how Jesus responded to her heartfelt worship. He accepted her just for who she was, and He'll do the same with us. Although others might be skeptical, He's eager to receive our sincere love and devotion.

Jesus never despises wholehearted affection.

WORSHIPERS ARE CHILDLIKE

As a Pharisee, Simon would have been schooled in worship. He would have studied David, the Psalms, and the Hebrews' long history of worship. His mastery of this topic would have far surpassed that of the sinful woman. In fact, if you were hosting a worship workshop, you might want someone like Simon to teach the session. He had a coherent, orthodox, clear theology of worship. He may have even written manuscripts on the topic. But when it came to actually honoring the Lord, his heart was distant and disengaged. A sinful woman who knew practically nothing about how to exegete biblical texts on worship demonstrated true

worship, because of a grateful heart, in the presence of this dignified Pharisee.

Worship is more than a theology; it's an effusion of affection.

This woman's simplicity and childlikeness schooled not only the Pharisee, but also the disciples. The disciples sat at Jesus' feet, so they probably had considerable knowledge about worship. But it took a sinful woman—someone who was uneducated about worship—to model worship for the disciples.

The longer we're with Jesus, and the more we mature in our faith, the more we're inclined to be like the disciples—stodgy, staid, and stuffy in worship. Do we somehow think we outgrow worship? Is it normal to expect that, the longer we're in the faith, the more reserved our worship will become? I think the answer's *no*.

Even elders are childlike. The more we get to know Jesus, the more heartfelt and extravagant our worship becomes. Worship is the domain of elders. Psalm 107:32 says, "Let them...praise Him in the company of the elders." Furthermore, look at the elders in the book of Revelation. They're repeatedly falling prostrate before the throne of God (Rev 4:9-11; 5:8, 14; 11:16; 19:4). The elders around the throne are among the foremost of heaven's examples of worship before the Lamb.

The disciples should have been the examples of a worshiper in this story, but instead they were shown an example. Some of our elders in our churches are still being shown, by the simplest among us, what it means to worship Jesus. As we read these words, let's resolve in our hearts that, as we mature in the knowledge of Christ, we will also grow in our simplicity of worship. The elderly slow down in their bodies but not in their spirits! Even in our elderly years, let's be a worshiper who leads others by example.

May I never become so mature as a believer that I lose my enthusiasm and zeal for the fame of His name!

WORSHIPERS ARE CARRIERS

Worshippers are carriers of the fragrance of Christ. After this anointing, the fragrance that was on Christ was also on this woman. When she left Christ's presence, she continued to carry His fragrance.

The scenario I'm about to depict is not recorded in the Bible, so it probably didn't happen. But my sanctified imagination wonders if something like this could have happened. I imagine Peter, later that day, walking the streets of the city and looking for Jesus. Suddenly, he detects a familiar odor. He recognizes it as the fragrance of the perfume the woman had poured upon Jesus earlier that day. *Jesus must be nearby!* Peter hurries around the corner, expecting to find the Master. But He's not there. Instead, he discovers he's facing the woman who anointed Jesus. It's hours later and she's still carrying the fragrance of Jesus with her.

The same happens with worshipers today. When we give our hearts to the Lord in extravagant worship, we carry with us the aura of Christ. This is the glory of worshipers. We carry the fragrance of Christ everywhere we go (2 Cor 2:14-16). Others recognize we've been with Jesus.

WORSHIP PRECEDED FORGIVENESS

We've seen from this woman's example that worshipers are givers, passionate, unashamed, childlike, and carriers of His presence. Now I want to use her story to show that personal shortcomings are not a hindrance to true worship.

Jesus said to this sinful woman, "Your sins are forgiven." I want to point out He spoke these words *after* she had worshiped. First she worshiped; then she was forgiven. I'm highlighting the sequence. Worship came first; cleansing followed. Jesus didn't require her to get all cleaned up and perfected first before she worshiped. He received her in her current condition.

Jesus still receives us in the same way. We don't have to be perfect before we draw near to Him. Because of the cross,

the Father now receives all His children into His presence, even when we're in need of cleansing. The cleansing happens in His presence.

The accuser doesn't want us to believe this. He wants us to think our sins and shortcomings make us unworthy to draw near to God. But his is not the only discouraging voice we hear; we also hear the voice of our conscience. Sometimes our hearts condemn us (1 John 3:20-21). We are experts at self-condemnation. Jesus called us to be perfect like our Father in heaven (Matt 5:48), but we often feel so inadequate. Our conscience beats up on us. The voices of the accuser and our conscience are sometimes very loud, making us tentative and uncertain in our approach to God.

The enemy has one agenda in accusing us: he wants us to feel so unworthy that we avoid God's presence. If he can succeed, sin will find an even stronger foothold in our lives and the darkness in our hearts will deepen.

The sinful woman in our story modeled the way forward. When there's sin in our lives, the answer is found by drawing near to God. We receive the sprinkling of Christ's blood as described in Hebrews 10:22, we drawn near in worship and adoration, He forgives and cleanses us, and then His grace empowers us to overcome.

Sometimes we get cleansed first and then worship. And then at other times, like this woman, we worship first and then are cleansed. The sequence is not the point. The point is that we draw near, pour out our affection, receive His cleansing, and live confidently in His embrace. As we worship in intimacy we gain strength to overcome sin. Satan accuses us because He doesn't want us accessing our source of overcoming power.

NO MORE CONDEMNATION

When we seek to draw near to God, sometimes we struggle to distinguish between conviction and condemnation. Let me try to help.

God convicts, but He never condemns. Conviction and condemnation are poles apart. Conviction leads to repentance; condemnation leads to despair. Conviction culminates in victory over sin; condemnation culminates in abject defeat. And here's the biggest difference of all. Conviction draws us toward God; condemnation pulls us away from God. If the impulse you're feeling is making you draw back from God in intimidation, it's condemnation. And God never condemns. Jesus Himself said so: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17; see also John 8:11).

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). *Condemnation* refers to eternal alienation from God. Before Christ, we were condemned to eternal separation from God. But through faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-22), the condemnation of sin is eternally lifted and we are welcomed into His embrace.

To clarify, Satan still *accuses* us. And the Holy Spirit faithfully *convicts* us. But there's no more *condemnation*. We have been eternally saved from the condemnation of hell.

With the cry of sonship now given to us by the Holy Spirit, we boldly draw near to God. Nothing can stop us from drawing near our Father—not even our own failures, sin, and brokenness. The blood of Jesus on our conscience silences the accuser (Heb 10:22; Rev 12:10-11), and we draw near to worship God in the beauty of holiness.

We don't ever approach God because we feel worthy. Even on our best week, we're still unworthy in ourselves to draw near to God. The only basis for coming close in worship is the blood of Christ and the righteousness of God by faith. We are now children of God! We are now led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14)! And the Spirit leads us boldly right into the throne room of heaven.

If you struggle with a recurring sin, the answer is not in pulling away from God and trying to work it out. The answer is in drawing near and receiving His empowering grace. The glory of His presence affects our sinfulness like radiation

affects cancer. As we worship in His presence, the power of sin in our lives is broken and we gain the grace to overcome.

Do you struggle with sin? Then worship! We find this secret in the example of this sinful woman. It's the secret the enemy tries fiercely to hide from us.

Jesus never says to us, "Wait a minute. There's sin in your life. Don't try to get close and love Me in that condition." On the contrary, He says, "Come close. Lean on Me. Let's talk." The only time it's inappropriate to worship God with sin in your life is when you have no intention of changing. But if you're resisting sin and seeking grace to change, draw near with confidence. It's your first step to victory.

God hates our sin. But here's the good news: Sin can't survive in His presence. This is precisely why, when we need cleansing, we must flee into His presence. That's where we receive healing, cleansing, holiness, and purity. This was Charles Wesley's message in these lyrics:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
 Let me to Thy bosom fly
 While the nearer waters roll,
 While the tempest still is high!
 Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
 Grace to cover all my sin;
 Let the healing streams abound,
 Make and keep me pure within.

OTHER HINDRANCES TO WORSHIP

It's coming clear. Sin need not hinder us from worshipping because God has made a way. But accusation isn't the only thing that tries to hinder us. Let me list a few other hindrances to worship. My hope is that by shedding light on these hindrances, you'll be enabled to overcome and draw near.

Another deterrent to worship is *pride*. Pride is possibly our greatest hindrance to worship. Pride could have held the sinful woman in our story from worshipping Jesus, but instead she poured herself out for Him. Pride has ruined more

worship services than all the forces of hell combined. Pride prefers conservative, low-key, ego-preserving worship. Pride restrains us from lifting our voices in the congregation. Pride robs us of the joy of dancing or lifting our hands or bowing in His presence. Pride incarcerates us in a self-conscious prison of spiritual bondage. Pride says things such as “Well, that’s just not my way of praising God.”

Worship and pride clash. They can’t both flourish at the same time. Worship implicitly kills pride with its self-abasement and humility. Stuffy sophistication has to go. Worship eagerly humbles self so God can be exalted.

David had a unique way of speaking of his glory. For example, he wrote, “I will sing and give praise, even with my glory” (Ps 108:1). By his term *my glory* he meant the reputation and status he had gained as king of Israel. His military conquests made him the greatest world leader of his day. He enjoyed unparalleled prestige, honor, riches, and influence. When it was time to worship, how would the most decorated king on earth conduct himself? He showed us in the above verse. Again, “I will sing and give praise, even with my glory” (Ps 108:1). Here’s what he meant.

David would gather his glory—all the splendor of what he had accomplished and accumulated—and pour it all out before the Lord. He went as low as possible. Worship was an opportunity to lift God high by going low. We can do likewise. We can gather all the glory of our attainments, pull ourselves erect to our full height, and then throw it all down prostrate before His glorious majesty. Worshipers love to accrue greater crowns because it gives them even more to cast at His feet. After all, it all came from Him in the first place.

Peer pressure is cousin to pride, and can also hinder our worship. By peer pressure, I mean our natural tendency to be concerned about how we appear in the eyes of others around us. Our flesh wants to look cool and dignified in the eyes of others. The desire for the approval of others can hinder us from giving ourselves wholeheartedly to Jesus in worship. Someone once said, “Never do anything because others

are looking at you, and never refrain from anything because others are looking at you.”

Presumption is another negative attitude that can hinder worship. We’re being presumptuous when we’re overly casual with God. “Yo God, whuzzup?” And God might answer, “The voice seems a bit familiar, but I don’t recognize the face.” Presumption fails to honor God’s holiness, and supposes we can approach Him in our own way and on our own terms.

Another hindrance in worship is *spectatorism*. I’m coining that term to refer to the tendency to look around during a worship service, watch everything that’s happening, and get so distracted by room dynamics that we never actually worship. While half the room is worshiping, half is watching. Paul made no mention in his epistles, however, of the ministry of surveillance. We’re not called to preside but to participate.

Corporate worship too often resembles a spectator sport: The congregation watches while the platform worships. Some worship services would be better described as a worship concert, meaning that there’s a ton of energy on the platform while the congregation kicks back and enjoys. But the biblical paradigm for corporate worship was never anything close to a performance/audience model. The Bible calls the whole room a spiritual priesthood (Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 3:16; 1 Pet 2:5-6; Rev 1:6). The purpose of the platform ministry is to unlock and release the praises of the congregation. The worship team is not successful unless they bring the entire congregation with them. We’re not spectators but participants in lifting high His glorious praise.

Sentimentalism can also stagnate worship. It’s easy to become sentimental over a favorite tune. We’ve become sentimental in worship when we’re more taken with the music than the lyrics. And we’ve become sentimental in worship when we prefer songs that are familiar over songs that are substantial. Songs that are overly familiar can become sentimental. These songs are so well known that the congregation disengages mentally and simply responds emotionally.

The Lord seemed to have this sentimental dynamic

in view when He described how Israel was responding to Ezekiel's message. He said to Ezekiel, "Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them" (Ezek 33:32). God knows how easily we are taken by the beauty of a nice melody without being penetrated by the message. Are we simply grooving to the music without really being gripped by the message of the song?

God made us to delight in music, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying it. But when it comes to worship, music has a holy purpose. God designed music to help us open our hearts and be more responsive to Him. We don't worship music or place our emphasis upon the music itself. Music is a vehicle, not an end in itself. St. Augustine observed, "When I am moved by the voice of him that sings more than by the words sung, I confess to have sinned." We don't want to simply be moved sentimentally by music; we want to be empowered through song to give our hearts in greater ways to God.

Another wrong attitude in worship is *paying lip service*. This happens when we mouth the words of a song but our hearts don't actually own the lyrics. This is halfhearted hypocrisy. We see this same half-heartedness at many times in Israel's history. The Jews would worship heathen gods and then turn around and approach God in worship. (For example, see Ezekiel 14:1-4.) To God, their words were nothing more than lip service. So God responded by saying, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments" (Amos 5:21-23). God would rather we keep our mouths shut than worship in pretense.

Something else that hinders some people in corporate worship is being *offended at leadership weaknesses*. For example, someone might think to themselves, "I'm not going

to let this worship leader hype me. He can try cheerleading if he wants to, but I'll have no part in it." Just because the worship leader has some weaknesses in his or her style doesn't give me permission to disengage and stage my own private resistance. Even if the worship leader is controlling or self-proclaiming, God is still worthy of my praise.

I'm sure you can identify many more hindrances to worship. Whatever might hinder us, we want to throw off the constraints and give our hearts fully to the Lord Jesus. The sinful woman in the above story didn't allow her sinful past to hinder her from worshiping Jesus. Let's follow her example and renew our resolve to let nothing stop us from abandoning our hearts in adoration for our beloved Lord.

Cast all your crowns!